

**YOUTH COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT:
TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL LEAVERS STUDY**

SPONSORED BY THE BUREAU OF ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE SERVICES

**CONDUCTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE KNOXVILLE
COMMUNITY HEALTH RESEARCH GROUP**

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of dropping out of high school has been studied widely, especially from the viewpoint of school-based prevention and intervention. Such studies seek to describe characteristics of youth who leave high school before graduating or are at risk of so doing. The studies elucidate factors influencing dropout decisions and precursors. However, once youth have dropped out or left high school, research on them diminishes, owing in large part to tracking difficulties.

This exploratory study begins to address the gap in the literature and in our knowledge of school leavers¹ in Tennessee and elsewhere. A brief literature review is included as Appendix 2 to set the stage for future hypothesis generation and testing. Here, a profile is presented of 338 Tennessee youth between the ages of 16 and 19 who left high school without graduating or receiving a GED. This study is mainly designed to examine health risks and alcohol and other drug use, abuse, and problems as well as reasons for leaving school in this population subgroup.

A companion study, entitled, "Comparison of Young Adult High School Leavers and Stayers," describes the results of an analysis of Tennessee high school leavers and stayers ages 18 to 34 based on 1993 data from a general population random sample household survey of Tennessee adults. This analysis fills in another gap in our knowledge, in terms of what seems to happen to school leavers as they reach maturity and how they differ as young adults from high school stayers. Derived from a random sample survey, results are generalized to the wider population of school leavers in Tennessee living in households. This report is available upon request from the UTK CHRG or The Bureau of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Services.

¹ The term "school leavers" is preferred here over the more pejorative "school dropouts."